

Key Points from Interview with John Tesoro, President and CEO of TÜV SÜD Americas Inc.

April 22, 2020

How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted TÜV SÜD America's business operations?

We took this COVID-19 epidemic as an opportunity to showcase and live our values. So, we focused on the safety of our people first and foremost, along with ensuring the safety of our customers. As an essential business, we stayed open and operational, yet had to be agile and innovate fast, ensuring we were providing a safe and secure environment for our people in the labs and in the field.

- We have been at the forefront of taking precautionary measures. As early as January 30, 2020, we started posting in our offices procedures for those that had traveled to other affected parts of the world.
 - Also, starting January 30, 2020, we created disinfection stations at our lab and office entrances, as well as across the rest of the lab and office space, educating and encouraging our employees and visitors to use those.
 - We formed a COVID-19 Task Force chaired by our Director of Health and Safety, Tanja Maynard, with representative expertise across the organization, and the Task Force started making actionable recommendations.
 - As early as March 12, 2020, we enabled work from home for those employees whose roles made it possible.
 - As early as March 12, 2020, we created staggered shifts in our labs to reduce the number of employees present in each space at the same time, and enforced social distancing mandates.
- Our employees rose as one, and really helped address the situation by finding ways to address the needs of the day.
- We ensured there was a continuous stream of communication to educate both our employees and customers. This has included daily emails from Tanja Maynard, the Director of Health and Safety, have provided the most up-to-date information and guidance to our employees, and “daily” has been quite literal, because Tanja sends communications on weekends as well.

Overall, our customer activity, though virtual, has increased, which is a testament to how aligned our employees have been in delivering mission-critical services to our customers.

- We created an Infographic on “12 Steps to Keep Coronavirus at Bay” and broadly disseminated it. It contains the state-of-the art recommendations for preventive and precautionary measures that people should take.

As a global company with headquarters in Munich, how do you align each country's different strategies to combat the pandemic?

We are very grateful to our global leadership for all the safety- and people-first communications and guidelines, and the inspiration that they have provided.

- Prof. Axel Stepken shared a very personal video showing himself working from home, and sharing words of encouragement with all employees.

- Ishan Palit joined one of our Town Hall virtual meetings to share words of encouragement, gratitude, and support.

Operationally, as an essential business, we have instituted split shifts, enabling the delivery of mission-critical services to our customers. Whenever possible, we have also launched remote services.

Our experts in the field have been provided with safety protocols to help ensure that they are stepping into safe situations. They are equipped with a pre-visit questionnaire and checklist to help them assess the safety of the situation.

- Our employees are empowered to step away from situations that do not meet the requirements of our established safety protocols.

We have stayed very connected globally, and have gleaned insights from our counterparts all over the world. We even have an ad hoc COVID-19-focused global newsletter that is sharing best practices from all over the world, enabling other locations to learn from those experiences.

- I participate in a global bi-weekly call with the TÜV SÜD Global Leadership Team that includes Prof. Axel Stepken.
- The Americas Task Force also reports into the Global COVID-19 Task Force.

As with any global organization, we are subject to the laws of the jurisdictions where we operate. In the Americas, we also have to be guided by the jurisdictional requirements. For instance, in the United States, while the Federal Government has issued guidelines for a phased reopening of businesses, it's the governors who have the final say over the reopening dates in their respective states, and we have to also consider these local mandates.

- Now, again, as an essential business, we have continuously stayed operational, while ensuring that the ultimate safety is provided both for our employees and customers.
- We have also enabled our employees to work from home whenever that is possible.
- We have prioritized support for medical devices in all areas of our business.

How do you keep staff morale up?

I am very proud of our people-first approach. And we have made a concerted effort to keep the human connection that so animates our business alive. And this has been the cornerstone of ensuring that employee morale is up, people feel connected, supported, and inspired.

We have instituted weekly Town Hall meetings where we have provided critical updates to ensure that everyone is on the same page. At those Town Halls, we have also shared Hero Stories – examples of our employees who have gone above and beyond helping their communities, innovating, finding alternative solutions.

We have instituted “Connect-Up Meet-Up” calls on Fridays where employees have explored ways of coping, shared strategies for being effective working from home, spoken about innovations they would propose, and the like.

- In fact, these Meet-Ups have enabled people who might not have necessarily crossed paths to meet and share experiences.

I have increased my email communications to all employees in the Americas.

These days, more than ever, I am personally reaching out to employees, often making unscheduled calls trying to pleasantly surprise them, showing how much I personally care, showing concern for their well-being, and seeking their opinion on what else we can do better.

- Our Director of Health and Safety, Tanja Maynard, is sending daily updates to our staff on all COVID-19-related matters. She also laces those with humor.

Any personal tip for working through this pandemic?

Make the most of the situation, and take a positive “glass-is-full” approach. Humor certainly helps. By now everyone knows of my haircut aspirations and adventures, and how badly I miss seeing my favorite sports teams play.

- We also started featuring our new “essential employees,” the Professional Pooches, this helps further humanize the situation, and help people feel less isolated.

Last, but not least, I am a natural optimist, and believe that every leader has to draw on their optimistic streak to lift up people. I also want to express my personal gratitude to our amazing people – all employees and customers – that are rising above these circumstances.

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